

SUMMARY

The discovery of documents

In the summer of 1965 the author participated in a German research project devoted to the anthropological study of the Sherpa, a Himalayan population of Eastern Nepal. The author's primary task was to collect detailed data for a demography of this people. In the course of their research, several members of the team and the author discovered certain significant documents. These documents, found in private houses, in temples and in Buddhist monasteries of the Nyingmapa sect, were of mixed character: Some, written in Tibetan, interwove old Tibetan or Sherpa mythological concepts with real genealogical enumerations of Sherpa ancestors and historical (or semi-historical) accounts of events extending over four to five centuries.

With the exception of one, the *Clear and Mirrorlike Description of the Genesis of Heaven and Earth*, which is a version of a widespread cosmogony in Buddhist countries, these Tibetan language documents can on the whole be classified as original Sherpa texts. It is difficult to estimate their age. The most important of them, the *Ruyi* or *The Report on the Bones* (bones meaning patrilineal clans), is probably four hundred years old.

Other documents were written in Nepali and date back to the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries. These are of purely historic content and throw light on the relations of the Sherpa with the authorities of the then newly established state of the Gurkha rulers of Nepal. These relations were based on mutual respect and a tolerant laissez-faire policy on the part of the government.

Reconstruction of the Sherpa clan-history and colonization

The discovery of the above mentioned documents rendered it possible for the first time to formulate a number of historic hypotheses concerning the original homeland of the Sherpa people, their migrations and final settlement in Solu-Khumbu and the expansion of their clans. These hypotheses are also supported by oral traditions of the Sherpa and by the application of statistical data, collected during the expedition. The more or less conjectural history of the Sherpa may be summarized as follows:

The Sherpa, now forming a distinct ethnic group among the hilltribes of the Himalayas with a population of more than 13000 individuals in their main dwelling area of Solu-Khumbu, were not always inhabitants of Eastern Nepal. Their ancestors came to their present home in the region of Mt. Everest from a district called Salmo Gang in the Eastern Tibetan province of Kham. This migration of more than 1250 miles took place at the turn of the 15th to the 16th century, as indicated by a Tibetan historiographic date: One of the emigrants was a pupil of Tertön Ratna Lingpa, a famous religious scholar, who lived from 1401 to 1477 A. D.

The reasons for this exodus can only be guessed. One of the texts discovered states that the emigration took place at a time of political tension between Kham and powerful neighbors in the North, the Mongols. These had in fact undertaken several military expeditions from the Kokonor to the South. It is therefore possible that the Sherpa's ancestors left their homes under outside pressure or at least in consequence of the general unrest created by